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Testimony in support of substitute for House Bill No. 4791

Madam Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Joe Rommel and I am an educational technology consultant for Berrien Regional Education Service Agency. Previous to this role I was a classroom teacher for 15 years, primarily for St. Joseph Public Schools in St. Joseph, Michigan. I have taught a number of grades and subjects and have always utilized technology to support the learners in my classroom. Social media has provided me opportunities to extend this learning outside the school day and also help build community amongst my students and school family.

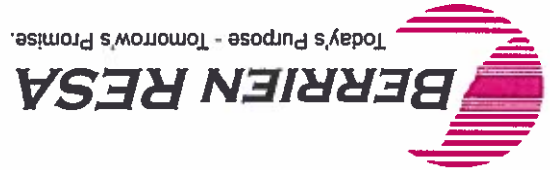
Social media also plays a large role in the lives of Michigan citizens. Preparing students to be productive citizens now includes preparing productive digital citizens. A productive digital citizen is a person that understands the lasting impact their own digital footprint represents, and the power that it can possess. This power can be used to create long lasting positive connections, or damage future opportunities. This substitute for House Bill No. 4791 calls for districts to create, or amend, a social media policy focused on promoting uses of social media. Requiring policy that is focused on promoting positive social media use a meaningful addition to the original bill.

It is important that our schools continue to model positive, effective social media usage with their communities. *"According to Kaplan Test Prep's most recent survey of nearly 400 college admissions officers across the United States, the percentage of admissions officers who visit applicants' social media pages to learn more about them has hit a record high of 40% — quadruple the percentage who did so in 2008, when Kaplan first explored this issue."*¹ School communities must prepare our students for an admissions process that is increasingly looking at social media to learn about prospective students.

Employers also increasingly rely on social media when hiring. An important point is that not having an online presence can be just as harmful. According to a poll of 2,200 hiring and human resource managers, *"Thirty-five percent of employers said they were less likely to interview job candidates who didn't have a digital footprint."*² Increased digital literacy is imperative to adequately prepare students to fulfill their potential and reach the goals of their future. This policy to 'promote instructional, educational, extracurricular, and digital literacy uses of social media' provides students with a needed positive image.

The professional use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest provide teachers with powerful learning networks to hone their craft. Creating content, sharing ideas, participating in virtual professional development, or connecting through a Twitter chat all occur daily with our teachers using social media.

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Personally I look forward to the #miched Twitter chat every Wednesday at 8 pm. This grassroots organization of educators seeks to connect teachers across our state to discuss a wide range of topics. Questions are tweeted out and educators respond using the miched hashtag (#miched), thereby connecting themselves to a larger audience. Curating these connections can bust the silos that often permeate educational buildings and districts. By connecting with other educators, teachers are able to overcome the isolation that is often felt behind a closed classroom door.

In closing, I look forward to working with the local districts I serve to assist in developing a social media policy that promotes the positive aims set forth in the substitute for House Bill No. 4791.